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Response Paper 3: *Beloved*

We are all born to a mother, and some of us are fortunate to receive the attention we desire, while others are not. Beloved was born to a mother who did not want her children to suffer the awful past that she had. Sethe was a slave, and was used mainly to have offspring with other slaves. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison illustrates a mother’s love to her child for protection. The haunting spirit of Beloved becomes outraged that her mother rid her so quickly, and makes constant appearances to show her bitterness to those around her. The haunting of Beloved is significant to the novel because it demonstrates how tough slavery was during its time period and it shows how Sethe learned to cope with Beloved’s anger in a comforting way.

The 1800’s were a very tough time for the African American race because of slavery. Sethe wanted what was best for her children, and in attempt to murder all three, was only successful with the killing of one while the other two escaped. Rather than having her children endure the harsh reality of living in slavery, Sethe viewed death as an easier way out for the sake of her children. “And they beat. The women for having known them and no more; the children for having been them but never again. They killed a boss so often and so completely that they have to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time. Tasting hot mealcake among pine trees, they beat it away. Singing love songs to Mr. Death, they smashed his head.” (128) Here is where we see a few examples of how slaves were treated. They were beat constantly and shamelessly. Being a mother who was traumatized by living a life as a slave, Sethe figured she did not need to bring her children into the cruel and awful world. She wasn’t doing it out of meanness, but simply to spare them from living life in hell.

Throughout the novel, we begin to notice that Sethe finds Beloved’s haunting a bit comforting. At one point, after Paul D tries to scare Beloved off, Sethe mentions that she kind wishes he didn’t, and that she felt oddly alone. “Sethe was flattered by Beloved’s open, quiet devotion. The same adoration from her daughter (had it been forthcoming) would have annoyed her; made her chill at the thought of having raised a ridiculously dependent child. But the company of this sweet, if peculiar, guest pleased her the way a zealot pleases his teacher.” (69) Here we see that Sethe admits she finds a bit of pleasure in the hauntings presence. She views it sweetly, instead of being terrified of what is really happening.

In summary, *Beloved* is a very twisted novel that not only takes us on a journey through the eyes of a slave, but also gives us a look on how Sethe dealt with the murder of her child through its haunting. We can see that Sethe and Denver just accept the presence of the baby ghost, and learn to go about their everyday lives dealing with its outrage. Knowing your mother is around, but never being able to actually experience the love and nurture that a mother is supposed to provide must be tough and heartbreaking for a young child to suffer through. Every person needs a little tender loving care in their lives, but poor Beloved was not around long enough to experience this first hand. Though the haunting of Beloved was an act of loneliness and a desperate cry for attention, it was a major part of Sethe and Denver’s lives. Sethe sought out the best for her children, and in her eyes, no life at all was better than a life of being enslaved. In the meantime, Sethe sought comfort within Beloved’s rage.